FPost 8/25/75

Kopechnes doubt Kennedy's story

WASHINGTON (AP) — The parents of Mary Jo Kopechne indicate in an article published by New Times magazine that they are not satisfied with Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's account of the auto mishap that took their daughter's life.

In what New Times describes as the first interview given by the Kopechnes to an American publication since the accident six years ago, they say they believe Mary Jo was sleeping in the back seat of Kennedy's car when it plunged off a bridgeon Chappaquiddick Island.

Her mother, Gwen Kopechne, is quoted further as saying she believes Kennedy "was still confused" about the mishap when he made his first statements and also was the victim of bad advice.

"He had poor advice, right from the time it happened. I think he got so involved in this lousy advice and then couldn't back out and tell the truth. He got deeper and deeper and deeper into it," Mrs. Kopechne is quoted as saying in the magazine article to be published Monday.

Mary Jo was a 28-year-old former campaign worker for Kennedy's brother, Robert, and attended a party with a group of other persons on the small island adjoining Martha's Vineyard on the night of July 18, 1969.

Kennedy's sworn statement is that he was returning to his hotel and taking Mary Jo back to hers when he made a wrong turn and accidentally drove off the bridge. He said he managed somehow to escape from the submerged car but was unable to rescue the girl.

Gerald Kelley, editor of a Martha's Vineyard weekly called the Grapevine, said the interview was conducted in July. He said the Kopechnes at the time were visiting the island and met Kelley through John Farrar, the skin diver who pulled Mary Jo's body from the car.

According to the magazine, the Kopechnes said they believed that Mary Jo had gone to sleep in the rear seat of the Kennedy car and "happened to be in the car when it took off."

Mrs. Kopechne was quoted as saying they hold "so bitter a feeling," against Joseph Gargan, a cousin of Kennedy, and Paul Markham, a former U.S. attorney, both of whom were at the party and according to later accounts, also went to the accident scene to try to rescue Mary Jo.

"What hurts most," Joseph Kopechne is quoted as saying, "is to think that my daughter had to be left there all night. At least his (Kennedy's) two buddies could have telephoned. Here was an outside possibility my kid could have been saved."

Kopechne also said, according to the magazine, that he and his wife rejected an autopsy of their daughter later because "we were made to believe that the autopsy was primarily to find out if my daughter was pregnant."

"There were so many things happening. We were being hit from all sides — north, south, east and west," he is quoted as saying.

Mrs. Kopechne also is quoted as saying she believes that other persons besides herself and her husband should be interviewed about Chappaquiddick but that "nobody's been under any pressure at all to answer questions."